

The Embarrassment of Poverty: 'Native' Jewish Responses to 'Foreign' Immigration in Comparative Perspective, Amsterdam and London in the Eighteenth Century

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Using primary source research about the eighteenth century, this paper will describe, analyze, and compare the similarities and differences in the responses by "native" Jews to "foreign" Jewish immigration in Amsterdam and London. This study will also examine the transformations this immigration wrought in these countries.

In the eighteenth century, something like 20,000 East European Jews settled in London. Their poverty and foreignness drew unwanted attention to them and native-born Jews alike. English Jews believed that East European Jews threatened their own status and well-being. This same dynamic played out, on a smaller scale, in Amsterdam, where there was a similar mass immigration of poor Jews due to wars, poverty, and repressive legislation in Germany and Eastern Europe. Like the migrants to Great Britain, these immigrants were seen to be an embarrassment and threat to the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam.

This study posits that the "native" Jews of Amsterdam and of London in the eighteenth century had similar responses to analogous waves of immigration. These two groups employed comparable mechanisms of self-identification and differentiation. Moreover, these responses and reactions are a prism through which transformations in the societies of the Dutch Republic and Great Britain can be viewed.

Free at Last? Sephardi Widows in Early Modern Amsterdam

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Widows were widely represented in the Sephardi community of early modern Amsterdam, more than anywhere else. One could find them in every stratum of the community: rich, middle class and poor. Their fate as a widow was not only determined by natural factors. It was also the consequence of the world they escaped. On the Iberian Peninsula, the Inquisition often took their husbands as victims, while others had turned into widows through pogroms and wars, back in their city of origin or during their flight to Amsterdam.

Our research investigates the widows' role within their family, the Amsterdam Portuguese community and the Dutch and international economy. It tries to find the similarities and contrasts in lifestyle between these and other widows in the early modern European world, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Besides, it defines the attitude the community members adopted towards them.

While elsewhere, the legal position of widows implied emancipation and independence, Sephardi women of early modern Amsterdam were mostly caught in a patriarchal system so typical for women of Iberian descent. Nevertheless, within the boundaries set for them, they showed a remarkable resilience in economic, social and emotional terms. Directly or indirectly they continued the economic strategy set out by their husbands and provided for their family. They were actively involved in family and community life and if sources allowed, cared for the wellbeing of their fellow Jews of Spanish Portuguese origin in Amsterdam and worldwide. In the course of the eighteenth century the situation changed somewhat: the group of Sephardi widows being dependent on the goodwill of the community leadership and private welfare grew in number. It led to an increasing humanitarian activity in terms of gifts to individuals or the foundation of *hevroth*, dedicated to alleviate their plight. It certainly did not contribute in giving the less fortunate widows a feeling of independence. In contrast, the more well-to-do seemed to enjoy respect and freedom of movement, increasingly.

It is these and other aspects of life of Sephardi widows of early modern Amsterdam that will be discussed in a forthcoming article defining the specific features of their position in early modern Europe.

New-England Is Seldom Wholly Without Them: Boston's Frazon Brothers and the Limits of Puritan Zeal

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From 1695 to 1705, Puritan Boston was home to Joseph and Samuel Frazon, two brothers of Sephardic origin who bore significant ties to the Portuguese Jewish communities of Amsterdam and London. In the course of their ten year sojourn in Massachusetts Bay, the Frazon brothers were the only Jews for miles around. The New England Puritans' long-standing fascination with typologies drawn from the Hebrew Bible and with Jewish history and scholarship inspired interest on the part of at least two prominent Puritan figures—Samuel Sewall and Cotton Mather—in the Frazon brothers. By their mere presence, the Frazon brothers helped to inspire a renewed Puritan discourse on the legacy of Judaism, particularly as it related to the question of whether or not church members ought to take active steps towards achieving New England's salvation. When Cotton Mather was eventually rebuffed in his attempt to convert the Frazons to Protestant Christianity, it was the brothers' former ties to the well-established theology of the Amsterdam and London Sephardic communities that seems to have rendered their Judaism impervious to such temptations.

For the Frazons, like many other Sephardim, itinerancy functioned as a mode of economic advancement, but it did not dilute their adherence to Judaism. Their collective experience was a testament to the trans-oceanic versatility of colonial-era Jews. The Atlantic world, with its many economic and cultural enticements, offered endless possibilities for reinvention. Free from the shadow of the Inquisition, whose oppressive influence nonetheless inspired an invigoration of extended kindred ties among the members of *La Nacion*, the Frazons and their ilk might easily have surged headlong into the commercial fray with minimal regard for their previous ties to Judaism. For better or worse, however, they seem not to have been overly eager on this account. Instead of severing their ties to the Old World, the Frazons made the most of their Jewish connections on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as between New England and the West Indies. When the most prominent member of the New England clergy failed to bring about the conversion of these men, he was apparently oblivious to the influence of such affiliations. Several decades later, as Mather began to lose hope, perhaps on the basis of this and other failures to convert Jews, he developed a new theology which, once and for all, dismissed the Jews as ultimately unimportant to the Second Coming of Christ.

Cities of the Dead: Architectural Motifs and Burial Practices in Curaçao's Religious and Ethnic Communities

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In this study we look to the cemeteries of Curaçao, a small island in the Dutch West Indies that was once a crucial Dutch player in the slave trade and the colonial American smuggling network. In addition, until around 1820, Curaçao had the largest, best educated, and most significant Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere. This community—and its gravestone art—influenced every other colonial Jewish settlement. Our study compares the Jewish (Spanish-Portuguese), Protestant (primarily Dutch), and Catholic (Afro-Curaçaoan) cemeteries and their use of architectural motifs. Following the work of Dickran and Ann Tashjian, Keith Cunningham, Lynn Gosnell, Suzanna Gott and others, we interpret these stones within the religio-cultural context of the people who used them. Yet whereas ethnic cemeteries in the United States often emphasize the distinctiveness of the communities, we found that Curaçao's cemeteries emphasize both ethnic distinction and elision. The permeability of racial and religious boundaries in the cemeteries reflects the island's complicated racial history and is an important reminder of how race is often defined and constructed differently outside of the United States. This permeability should not be confused with social equality: indeed, as racial categories became more fluid, islanders used other categories such as wealth and status displays to reinforce social privilege within (as opposed to between) ethnic groups. Although the colonial Jewish cemetery has been extensively surveyed, there have been no publications in English regarding the Catholic or Protestant cemeteries on the island, nor of the later Jewish cemetery (1864-present). This article, a collaboration with Professor Laura Leibman of Reed College following on site research from the summer of 2008, contains the first survey of all of the early cemeteries found on the island. By looking at cemeteries across racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries, we seek to better understand how group identity was defined—and defied—through burial practice on the island.

Holywell Street vs Jodenbreestraat: Jewish Spaces in the Aesthetic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century London and Amsterdam

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This paper examines and compares artistic representations of Jewish areas of settlement in nineteenth-century London and Amsterdam, in particular of Holywell Street and the Jodenbreestraat respectively. A growing number of British and Dutch gentile painters turned to these urban areas, which had escaped redevelopment efforts and consequently became the epitome of “quaint” and “authentic” places in an otherwise rapidly changing city. However, the fact that these streets occupied many Jewish families influenced the ways in which Holywell Street and the Jodenbreestraat were interpreted and represented. In Victorian London, for instance, Holywell’s architecture – its dilapidated buildings and cobblestone streets – inspired artists to produce highly romanticized depictions, but its inhabitants simultaneously granted the neighborhood a shady reputation due to the ambivalent attitudes of Londoners towards Jews. The growing presence of bookstores selling “dirty books” and “obscene literature” in Holywell Street, virtually all of which were owned by non-Jews, only added to its dual status in the aesthetic and popular imagination. Holywell’s decrepit housing, old-fashioned shop-fronts, and narrow pavements were concurrently celebrated and censured.

The story is different with regard to the Jodenbreestraat, not merely because of distinctive spatial topography in Mokum, but also because of the peculiarities of Dutch society at large. This paper will explore why the *Joodse Buurt*, depicted as a place exuding *karakter*, occupied a more positive place in the Dutch aesthetic imagination than elsewhere.

Paintings by Dutch artists, such as Johannes Hilverdink’s “Jodenbreestraat” (c. 1860), Eduard A. Hilverdink’s “Huis van Rembrandt in de Jodenbreestraat” (1867), Pieter Vertin’s “Winterdag in de Jodenbuurt” (1877), and Charles Lapante’s “In de Jodenbuurt” (1879), to name a few, will be discussed in this paper. These artists tried to capture the prevailing atmosphere of the hustle and bustle in the city’s Jewish district. They created oftentimes highly romanticized portraits of everyday life, applying gentle yellow and brown tints to soften the harsh realities of dire poverty still rampant among large segments of the Dutch Jewish population. As for London, the watercolors of T. Hosmer Shepherd, C. J. Richardson, and J. W. Archer – all of which featured Holywell Street as their subject matter – are particularly rich expressions of British ambivalence toward the “London ghetto.”

This paper’s contribution is twofold. First, by taking into consideration Jewish history, nineteenth-century art, and urban development, it aims for a multi-disciplinary approach to Jewish Studies – an approach that has proven quite effective in providing new insights into Jewish history, society, and culture. Second, this paper aims to make a contribution to the scholarly literature on the Amsterdam Jewish community and on Jewish-Gentile relations, which have received comparatively little attention in the English language, particularly with regard to the nineteenth century.

Arno Stern (1888-1949): The Itinerary of a Jewish Artist in Pre-War Belgium

Barbara Dickschen – Université Libre de Bruxelles

The Jewish Polish painter Arno Stern (1888-1949), has had his most successful years as an artist in Belgium, where he lives from 1923 till 1940, actively participating at its cultural life. Though he enthusiastically adheres to the main modern movements, being friends with the major representatives of the Belgian vanguard, he'll always cultivate his specificity as a Jewish artist.

His life is that of so many young Jewish intellectuals who have broken with tradition and decidedly chosen modernity, thereby being constantly at the bridge of two cultures, one modern and Western, the other rather ancient and Oriental. The perpetual uprooted artist had made the choice to live in Belgium, taking over its national languages, its cultural habits and symbols. The war makes him an exile again...

Jewish entrepreneurs in the Dutch film business, 1910-1940

Fransje de Jong – Universiteit Utrecht

"Especially during the interwar years there was a considerable quantitative overrepresentation of Jewish entrepreneurs in the film sector in the Netherlands compared to their total share in the population. Besides, most of the key positions between 1918 and 1940 were occupied by Jewish cinema owners and film distributors, with Abraham Tuschinski and Loet Cohen Barnstijn in front. On the institutional level Jewish entrepreneurs were key players within the board of directors and other organizing committees of the Dutch Cinema League, the most important professional organization of the Dutch film business, which was presided by the Jewish cinema owner David Hamburger Jr for almost twenty years. The phenomenon raises two simple questions with, however, more complicated answers: in the first place, how can we explain this concentration of such a small minority in the film business in the Netherlands during this era? Secondly, did it matter at all that they were Jewish and to whom? This presentation addresses the question in what ways and to what extent Jewish identity affected the economic activities and entrepreneurial strategies of the Jewish film entrepreneurs"

'Ezra: a Jewish help organisation in Antwerp for Jewish transmigrants, 1920-1940'

Lien Vloeberghs – Universiteit Antwerpen

This study on Jewish transmigration in Antwerp focuses on one Jewish organisation, namely Ezra. Ezra helped Jewish transmigrants in the city who came from Eastern Europe to take a ship to the United States or another destination. They aided them by assisting with their legal documents, giving them moral advice, taking care of sick migrants, organizing the relief for migrants who had to wait longer than expected,... The organisation was founded in 1903 but this study focuses on the period between 1920 and 1940, the years when migrating became more and more difficult due to migration restrictions in the destination countries like the United States, especially for Jewish migrants.

This is a study on the motivation of the people working for Ezra. In the first place, they had the money and the social status to do the job. All of them were wealthy diamond merchants belonging to the elite of Jewish Antwerp businessmen. They themselves migrated from Eastern Europe to Antwerp. To get a better insight in their motivation, I compared Ezra with the Jewish organisations in Germany which helped transmigrants.

But this research also focuses on the institutions and organizations which Ezra worked and conversed with. Only in this way it is possible to completely understand the work of the organization. Because it was thanks to its network, that Ezra was able to help so many transmigrants. Firstly, Ezra had to cooperate with and work in the context of the existing Antwerp Jewish society. In 1920 "het Centraal Beheer voor Joodse Weldadigheid" or translated the Central Administration for Jewish Benevolence was founded in Antwerp: it was an organisation that covered the finances, collaboration and competition between the already existing Jewish aid organisations in Antwerp. In this way, Ezra profited from an unique organized structure of social help in the Antwerp community because it could send its migrants to other organisations that provided meals or second hand clothes. Secondly, via the Belgian governor for emigration, the Belgian government helped Ezra by providing cheap Belgian visas and in other administrative ways. The governor of emigration helped Ezra because it was his concern that the transmigration passed as fast as possible. Thirdly, through the years, Ezra had built up a network of Jewish organisations in the countries of emigration, transit and integration. That network provided Ezra with a lot of information which was essential in order to be able to react flexibly to the changes in the worldwide migration movements. Also the financial help of bigger international Jewish organisations was essential to the working of Ezra.

Jewish Bourgeoisie in Amsterdam, the case of two fashion houses, 1890-1935

Huibert Schijf – Universiteit van Amsterdam

Many of the new fashion houses in nineteenth century Amsterdam were founded by German immigrants who were either Jewish or Catholic. The presentation will focus on two Jewish fashion houses, the still existing Bonneterie (with a branch in The Hague) and Hirsch & Cie, a company that went bankrupt in the early 1960s. Hirsch & Cie. was founded by the Sylvain Kahn (1857-1929) who came from the French Elzas and his German brother-in-law Sally Berg (1857-1924) from Warburg, Westphalen. They met each other during their apprenticeship at Hirsch in Brussels, the original fashion house. Thanks to his wife Julie Kahn- Berg (1861-1935), another member of the Berg, her niece Rosa Wittgenstein (1868-1949), arrived in Amsterdam and together with her husband Josef Cohen (1860-1924) would found the Bonneterie. In the presentation several other family relations are elaborated. Both fashion houses offered garments to the upper-class, both gentile and Jewish. Although the houses are situated in the heart of Amsterdam, their magnificent private dwellings were outside the centre of Amsterdam in new fashionable neighbourhoods near the Vondelpark, far away from the traditional Jewish quarter. Moreover, the families were not very religious. Given the wealthy design of these private villas both families were clearly well-to-do. Through a description of the vicissitudes of the several family members the presentation elaborates on themes like identity, migration and integration, especially the Kahn family lived very much of their own, and finally on the important contribution of German-jewish immigrants to the city of Amsterdam in the nineteenth century.

Differentials in household structure among Jewish families in Amsterdam, 1880-1940

Peter Tammes – Universiteit Leiden

Frans van Poppel - NIDI

Although some studies describe Jews as very family oriented and as frequently having more distant family members in their households we do not have exact information about the household structure among Jewish families in the Netherlands. Statistics indeed show high population density in the Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam, the city in which the majority of Dutch Jews lived, but this kind of information does not allow us to relate this to higher numbers of kin in Jewish families. To study the family structure of Jewish families in Amsterdam we use micro data covering the period from the last decade of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. To study these questions we collected data from the population registers in Amsterdam on family formation of about 700 descendants from Jewish grandparents born between 1883-1922. This is an interesting period as it was characterized by a fertility and mortality transition, which could have caused profound changes in family composition and structure. Moreover, this period was also characterized by a process of social and economic assimilation of Jews, making it interesting to find out whether there is a relation between the (changing) household structure and the process of assimilation. Our first question will be: how did the household structure of Jewish families look like? Secondly, we study how the household structure among Jews developed over time. Finally, we try to find out whether there was a relationship between assimilation processes and household structure. To study this issue we take into account whether or not the family was living in a religiously mixed district, what their religious affiliation was, and whether they had contracted a religiously mixed marriage. Finally, we would like to know to what extent household formation is related to the parental household structure: does the household structure of the parental home affect the formation of one's own household?

The *Aliya Beth* in Belgium

Jacques Déom – Université Libre de Bruxelles

Between 1945 and the independence of the State of Israel, intensive efforts were made by the Zionist movement in order to bring to Palestine, then placed under British mandate, several thousands of so-called "displaced persons" coming back from nazi concentration camps and death centers who were vegetating in Belgium. These operations must be considered as against the background of an Europawide initiative – named *Aliya Beth* – aiming at "gathering the exiles" by forcing the blocade imposed by the British. Three boats packed with Jews from Belgium (the *Tel Hai*, the *Hahayal Haivri* and the *Theodor Herzl*) set off from Antwerp, La Ciotat and Sète (near Marseille, France) towards the coasts of Eretz Israel (in March and July 1946 and in April 1947 respectively). Intercepted on the open sea by the British Navy, the refugees were doomed to wait in camps in Atlith and on the isle of Cyprus for the proclamation of the new State to open the doors of the country. Nothing has been written on this dramatic episode, wich the historian has to reconstruct entirely on the basis of the archives of the different parties involved, as well as the oral testimony of witnesses or actors of these events. As much as it is a contribution to the history of zionism, this research should shed light on some aspects of the socio-economic and juridical situation of refugees in Belgium in the age of the post-war reconstruction. It is also apt to specify the attitude of Belgium – its decision makers, its various political trends and its public opinion – in front of the zionist project, then in active development, but also confronted with the harsh reactions of its British allies.

The Vaad Hahatzala and the Reconstruction of Orthodoxy in the Netherlands, 1945-1950

Bart Wallet – Universiteit van Amsterdam / Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

After the end of the Second World War an almost boundless energy seems to have taken control of many in the Dutch Jewish community during the immediate postwar years. Traditional leaders were active in rebuilding the old, familiar institutions, while others seized the postwar situation to try to realize finally their ideals for new organizations that would overcome prewar divisions.

The small number of Orthodox Jews in the Netherlands sought to strengthen their position within the whole of Dutch Jewry. One of their activities was the foundation of a Dutch branch of the international Orthodox relief organization Vaad Hahatzala. On February 22, 1946 the founding act was signed and the Dutch Vaad started its activities. Within the Dutch Vaad both Agudists and Mizrahists were represented, and they frequently clashed over the organization's policies. The Vaad aimed to strengthen Orthodoxy in the Netherlands via financing relevant activities and initiating new ones. The Vaad thus spread prayerbooks and tallitot among Dutch Jews, helped Jewish organizations to maintain a kosher kitchen, but as well financed an Orthodox childrens' home. The most prestigious initiative was the foundation, together with the Conference of Chief Rabbis, of a yeshiva in Leiden. Students were brought from Hungary, while also some Dutch Jewish boys enrolled. Finally, the yeshiva had to shut its gates. The Vaad was not able to finance the yeshiva on the long run. Dutch Orthodoxy had to accept that they were a tiny minority and had to collaborate with the entire Jewish community in order to survive.

Identity (Re)construction and Political Engagement. Jewish Activists and the Communist Party of Belgium

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In 1944, Jewish communist activists, strengthened by the sympathy acquired through their actions during occupation and by the credit the Communist party of Belgium (CPB) then enjoyed, occupy a significant place within the Jewish community.

Fully committed to the political struggle and very active within the trade unions, while also taking an active role in the reconstruction of the Brussels Jewish community, these activists are engaged with a population mostly made up of immigrants.

Emigrated from the « yiddishland » of Eastern Europe and settled in Belgium between the two World Wars, these activists are quickly torn between their ideological allegiance and the strong, conscious affirmation of their Jewish identity, a natural form of self-expression which the CPB regarded with suspicious indifference.

The frictions that ensued highlight the difficult, seemingly impossible, combination between an active attachment to Judaism and a strong political ideal realized through an unquestioned allegiance to the Party and to the Soviet regime (which will lead some of these activists to return to Poland to help build "real socialism").

But these frictions also highlight the very ambivalence of these activists towards the communist utopia. The vocal and active affirmation of their distinctively Jewish identity does not amount, in their minds and philosophy, to communitarian isolationism or nationalism, but rather the will to preserve and pass on to future generations their specific cultural and historical heritage.

In the aftermath of the liberation, the self-identity of Jewish communists is thus ripe with ambiguities and their ways of dealing with these political and personal contradictions and paradoxes exacerbated by the historical conjuncture are complex. They are at the core of our project and we intend to investigate the aspirations and demands of Jewish immigrants through an extensive review of the actions and writings (publications, pamphlets...) of these activists.

They were left in material and psychological disarray by a devastating war, challenged by a hard-line communist doctrine coldly asserted by the CPB and confronted by harsh Belgian policies that forbid any political activity to non-citizens. Their fate illustrates – and enriches our understanding of – post-war Belgium's complex process of rebuilding.

Religious Influences on the Jewish Conceptualization of Disability

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This paper is based on the preliminary results obtained through a doctoral research which purpose is to investigate the Jewish parents' conceptualization of their own experiences as parents of children with intellectual problems. The fieldwork site selected is Antwerp, where is a large community of Jewish people and there exists a special institution for disabled Jewish people who are enrolled from different places around the world.

In relation to the objectives of this research, the majority of the theoretical assumptions and hypotheses are based within the theoretical constructivist framework, which indicates that the words and concepts allow us to explain and to interpret reality. Concepts make it possible to organize the complexity of reality and make it more intelligible. Likewise, disability will be studied as a conceptualization or categorization.

Researchers specialized in disability studies, have described the evolution of concepts such as handicap, disability, impairment and challenges. However, regardless of the concept used, there is always some social impact within a particular social group. Some of these social responses are: discrimination, racism, indifference, etc. Whatever the reaction, it always reflects something deeper, something which arises from the culture's traditions.

One of the arguments in this manuscript is that the culture is very important in determining the social responses to different phenomena and it is assumed that religion is the most important cultural aspect present in different social groups and the basis of the dominant social construction(s). One of the hypotheses is that despite people are not actively practicing their religion; they remain attached to its essential beliefs. Thus, an argument in this paper is that despite the Jewish people not being homogenous in religious observation, nonetheless, they categorize disability in the light of religion which remains central to their culture.

Building upon the idea of social responses produced by social conceptualizations, this paper focuses on Jewish responses to disability from a religious perspective. The Jewish view of disability, whether as something wrong or something incidental, derives from their beliefs. Consequently, whether and how they perceive disability; as a sin requiring sacrifice or as an incidental challenge that can be addressed by scientific methods, becomes an interesting dialectic process leading to a synthesis a uniquely Jewish response, a process worthy of study and better understanding.

"We are (not) the master of our body": Religion and Ethics at the End of Life. Attitudes of Elderly Jewish Women in Antwerp towards Treatment Decisions in Advanced Disease

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Due to the achievements of medicine during the past decades the power of humankind with regard to life and death has increased. Making use of the available biomedical technology man is, in an important way, not only able to control and cure diseases, but also to regulate his own life project, even his own death. Consequently, during recent years we are all the more confronted with ethical questions and challenges. Human beings, adhering to a specific world view or religious tradition, deal with these ethical issues in various ways. One's conception of life - the way everything is according to a situated human being - influences one's opinion on what ought to be done in case of a (bio)ethical dilemma. Although multireligiosity is a prominent characteristic of contemporary western societies, present-day bioethical debates are often approached from the point of view of the large western ideological traditions, the Christian tradition and the non-religious humanist tradition, while hardly any attention is paid to the attitudes of other ethnic and religious groups. Although being full members of Belgian society, Jewish voices in important bioethical debates are not heard. This first explorative qualitative empirical study on attitudes of elderly Jewish women (age 60-75) in the orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp towards treatment decisions in advanced disease aims to bridge this gap. 23 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed using a Grounded Theory Methodology. Despite the essentially orthodox character of the Antwerp Jewish community the research reveals a diversity of viewpoints. Respondents who do not consider themselves orthodox (and religious) perceive illness and death as merely profane facts, they stress a patient's (absolute) right to self-determination, oppose futile treatment and show an acceptance of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide. On the other hand, absolute rejection of every act which deliberately terminates life is found among the overwhelming majority of orthodox (Hasidic and non-Hasidic) respondents. They have an unconditional faith and trust in God's sovereign power over the domain of life and death. Hasidic respondents stress that every effort must be made to extend life. Non-Hasidic Orthodox women hold a rather intermediate position in this. Thus, the research reveals an intra-sample diversity and shows that a person's religious belief and world view influence the way he or she handles ethical dilemmas.